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NEWS — SCHOOLS

Mystic School rehab plans on hold after estimates come in higher than expected

ALISON SWALLOW | STAFF WRITER

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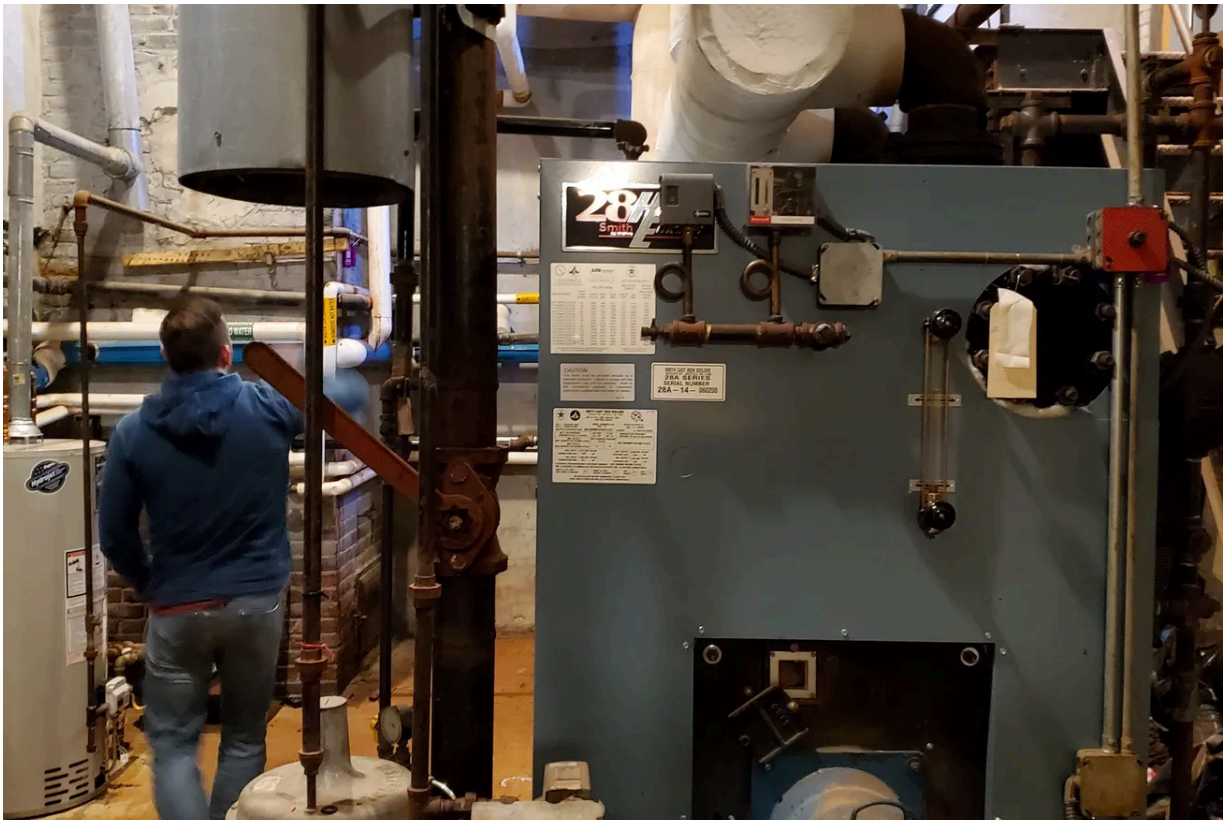

Recreation Department Director Nick Cacciolfi walks alongside the antiquated boiler system at the Mystic School. WINCHESTER NEWS STAFF PHOTO/NELL ESCOBAR COAKLEY

A few weeks ago, the Select Board was ready to fund a replaceme
failing HVAC and electrical systems at the Mystic School, but thos

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appear to be on hold now, after cost estimates came in much higher than anticipated.

The issue initially came up during a Jan. 8 Select Board meeting where Recreation Department Director Nick Cacciolfi and Department of Public Works Facilities Manager Pete Lawson spoke to the board about the ongoing problems with the heating system across the building.

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Recreation Department Director Nick Cacciolfi shows one of the heating units used at the Mystic School to regulate temperature in a classroom with young kids. The unit has to be monitored as it drains water into an overflow bucket. WINCHESTER NEWS STAFF PHOTO/NELL ESCOBAR COAKLEY

The Select Board voted to approve $150,000 for engineering work
discussion about whether or not to invest American Rescue Plan

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to upgrade the building. The board also informed the School Committee about the project because the building is still in control of the School Department.

During last week's School Committee meeting, Superintendent Frank Hackett addressed the latest findings.

"There was some energy and conversation around trying to get an HVAC replacement, and the town's gone through the process and has kept us informed," said Hackett. "The preliminary thought or estimates around what that might cost went from a little over $1 million or $1.5 million to significantly more, as these projects sometimes do."

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A door to the boiler room cautions about asbestos. Whenever there is a steam leak at the school, workers need to contact asbestos experts to deal with the problem, costing the town time and money. WINCHESTER NEWS STAFF PHOTO/NELL ESCOBAR COAKLEY

Hackett said Andrew Marron, director of finance & operations fo
schools, met with town management and Lawson about the scop

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project, adding “it’s apparent that there won’t be any full-scale work done this summer as part of any kind of project, but as we find out more and know more, we’ll keep you posted.”

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Chris Nixon suggested making incremental repairs to the systems, rather than a complete overhaul.

“I don’t know that we’ve actually seen an actual document, in terms of an estimate for $1.5 million,” he said. “I think that might have been sort of an inside baseball number that was being kicked around between management and DPW. But now that the number has come in much higher, my suggestion to the committee … is that I see Mystic a lot like I see Muraco.”

Nixon referred to the Muraco life extension plan instituted by the town four years ago to make necessary repairs to extend the life of the building for 10 years, knowing that the town would mostly likely replace the school building.

“We did not put a brand-new roof over all of Muraco,” Nixon said. “We re-roofed a portion of it; we did repair work.”

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Exposed electrical wiring in the boiler room of the Mystic School. WINCHESTER NEWS STAFF PHOTO/NELL ESCOBAR COAKLEY

Instead of replacing the entire electrical system, Nixon reminded everyone that "we replaced those components that were necessary so we could feel confident we could stretch that building out until 2029-2030."

He said the money the town put into the school was worth it, adding "we budgeted $3.6 million for that work [and] we are substantially under budget today, with all that work done. We are hundreds of thousands of dollars under budget."

"We need to get through our master plan to give this committee some guidance about what the future of Mystic is. I'm not convinced that building is standing in 20 years," Nixon added. "Our current master plan [which was completed in the spring of 2017] says 'you don't need it right now, but don't get rid of it because you might need it in a decade' now it's time to study that again.

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Wires and a plank keeping the system together at the Mystic School. Signs warning about asbestos are posted around the pipes. WINCHESTER NEWS STAFF PHOTO/NELL ESCOBAR COAKLEY

"If we have more of a short-term interest in Mystic, I would argue committee, we should be having a conversation with engineering planning and management about what smaller scale investments are

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necessary," Nixon continued. "Because our kids need reliable heat, reliable controls in that building, and not just for next year but for some number of years until we can really consider the ultimate disposition of that building.

"The point I'm making to the committee is, we can make changes at Mystic and still do good," he concluded. "We used to heat the building with coal...Even today, a high efficiency modular gas-fired boiler would be a more efficient solution than what we have. I'm not saying we should go that way, but I think we can make some smart decisions with respect to our climate action plan, and also be sensitive towards our utility bills."

Broken windows on the outside of the Mystic School cause issues with the heating of the school. WINCHESTER NEWS STAFF PHOTO/NELL ESCOBAR COAKLEY

Nixon said he was interested in learning more from the ongoing discussions that Marron is having with town management and DPW, and the School Committee agreed to add the item to future agendas.

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Winchester News staff reporter Nell Escobar Coakley added to this report.

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March 4, 2026

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Rep. Michael Day helps House colleagues pass sweeping energy affordability bill

The following was submitted by the Office of Rep. Michael S. Day: Rep. Michael S. Day and his colleagues in the House of Representatives recently passed energy affordability legislation that would result in over $9 billion in savings for utility ratepayers over the next 10 years. The bill maintains critical

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Winchester gun owners face new training rules starting April 2

Public safety data How Winchester compares on firearms licenses in comparable Massachusetts communities Active licenses as of Jan. 25, 2025 — Source: Massachusetts Criminal History Systems Board License to carry firearms Firearms identification card Winchester and Marblehead are the focus communities. Peers selected based on comparable population size, demographics and suburban

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Sen. Jason Lewis, Mass. Senate strengthen fair housing protections for renters, buyers

The following was submitted by the Office of Sen. Jason Lewis: State Sen. Jason Lewis joined his colleagues in the Massachusetts Senate to pass legislation that protects residents from discrimination in the housing market as the Trump administration abandons its enforcement of the federal Fair Housing Act. Illegal discrimination continues

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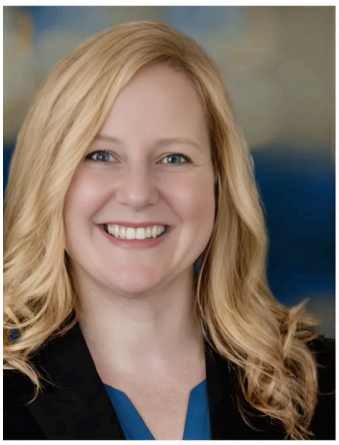

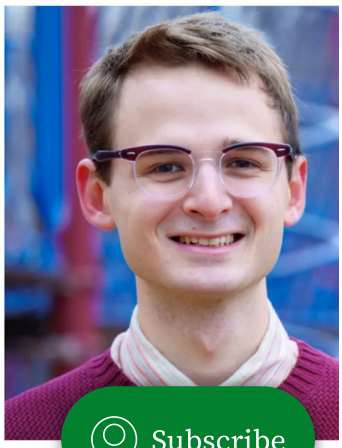

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Celebrate Women's History Month with Girls Leading Change

The following was submitted by the Network for Social Justice: To mark Women's History Month and International Women's Day in 2026, the Network for Social Justice is collaborating with club leaders from Winchester High School and members of the Community Health team from La Colaborativa in Chelsea and

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Winchester School Committee candidates bring contrasting backgrounds to Thursday forum

Two candidates for Winchester's School Committee will face voters at a forum as the district navigates a new literacy curriculum, budget pressures and questions about student mental health. Heather von Mering and John Bellaire are competing for an open seat on the School Committee, which oversees a budget von

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FEATURES

'Chicago: Teen Edition' dances onto the Winchester High School stage

By Talia Ho | Correspondent Fame. Fortune. And all that jazz. This spring, Winchester High School presents "Chicago: Teen Edition," a bold musical that explores celebrity culture, media manipulation, and the cost of ambition. This iconic production is set in the 1920s. Performances will take place on March 13 and 14

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March 4, 2026

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Ripley Chapel in Winchester presents 'Syldason: You Are Welcome Here'

The following was submitted by the Ripley Chapel at First Congregational Church: On Friday, March 13, beginning at 7:30 p.m., live in-person and live streamed from the stunning Ripley Chapel at First Congregational Church, Winchester, 21 Church St., join in with Syldason, a duo concert featuring Sylvie Zakarian,

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